

Despite heavy rains and flooding only days before, good sized crowds turned out to talk with me at town meetings last week in Grand Bay, Dauphin Island, and west Mobile. I was also pleased to shake hands and talk face to face with residents of Peterman, Pollard, East Brewton, Creola, McIntosh and many other communities. Four stops in Baldwin County still await me and my staff as this column goes to press.

From the road, I can tell you that residents at every point are concerned about the \$15.7 trillion national debt. Unemployment and the economy are also uppermost on many minds. Not surprisingly, the long-term viability of Medicare and Social Security was a major concern of more than a few seniors.

As I told audiences at the West Mobile Regional Senior Center, the national debt is not a Republican or Democrat creation. It has been built brick by brick by both parties, and it will take some time to get under control. That said, in only three and a half years President Obama has increased the size of the national debt by more than any other president during the same amount of time. We simply cannot sustain the current level of federal deficit spending that the president is determined to continue.

One gentleman at a town meeting asked me what Congress is doing to address the debt problem.

The Republican-led House - which was sworn in less than two years ago - passed budgets in 2011 and 2012 to cut federal spending. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we in the House try to rein in government, we find that we are dancing with ourselves. The Senate has not only ignored our budgets, it hasn't passed a budget of its own in three years. While we have been successful in forcing the Senate and the president to agree to \$100 billion in spending cuts, it is a mere drop in the bucket compared to what is needed.

As I shared with those who attended my town meetings in Monroeville, Atmore and elsewhere, a host of very tough decisions about the budget will likely be put off until the end of the year. During the so-called lame duck session, which will likely occur in November and December, Congress will have to face the expiration of the 2003 "Bush tax cuts," as well as "sequestration" - automatic cuts of \$1.2 trillion in federal spending including \$600 billion in defense cuts. Washington has kicked the can down the road for years, but there is a dead end looming ahead

that cannot be ignored.

If the Bush tax cuts are allowed to expire, come January 1, 2013, Americans will be saddled with \$500 billion in tax increases affecting practically every household. Sequestration will have a particularly large negative impact on our military at a time when safety and security around the globe are at a premium.

Medicare recipients will also be inconvenienced if the federal reimbursement rate for doctors providing Medicare is cut due to the expiration of the "Doc fix" provision. Many doctors have told me they may stop treating Medicare patients unless they continue to receive adequate reimbursement from Medicare.

Last but not least, Congress must once again grapple with whether to raise the debt limit, which is due to expire in early 2013.

Throughout the last two years, the House has not shied away from addressing the monumental challenges facing this country. We have proposed solutions to save Medicare and strengthen Social Security so that both programs will survive to serve future generations. Last March, we passed a budget that cuts spending by \$5 trillion and reduces the deficit by \$3 trillion over ten years compared to President Obama's budget. We also voted no less than 25 times to either repeal outright or reduce funding for the president's controversial budget-busting health care law.

As I told those who attended my town meetings, we cannot begin to get a handle on the budget crisis facing our country unless we also take steps to reinvigorate our economy. The president has only offered more taxes and spending, which have done little to grow jobs. The House has passed over 30 bills to lift the burden of government from small businesses - America's job creators - and the Senate has blocked every one in a cynical political game.

As a gentleman at my Grand Bay town meeting reminded me, we are not Democrats or Republicans first, but Americans. In this spirit, we each have a duty to work together to seek a solution to the problems facing our land. This South Alabama common sense is often missing in Washington, and sadly, particularly at the White House, which often appears more interested in political maneuvers than serving the best interest of the people.

I want to thank everyone who attended my town meetings last week and I will carry your ideas back to Washington.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

For release June 18, 2012